

As the world changes, and other powers emerge, we will be challenged more militarily than in the past. We will no longer be able to simply coerce others. We must be able to persuade them. And the ability to persuade exists only with an earned and maintained moral authority that must be nurtured by a consistent application of our core values in all that we do.

Recent aberrations like Abu Ghraib and Haditha, serious departures from American values, do immeasurable damage to America's image. Such actions erode our moral authority and seriously undermine America's ability to persuade. The power of values is enormous, especially in this context. To pursue policy that departs from moral values is to create a weaker and more vulnerable America.

This is exactly why it is critically important to vigorously debate legislation like the Patriot Act; enemy combatant and detainee policy. There is no place for juvenile attacks on the patriotism or courage of one member of Congress against the other. These decisions affect not only the security of America but the prism through which America is viewed throughout the world.

Without mature deliberation on these so very complicated issues, we run the risk of implementing policy inconsistent with American principles and world values. And that erodes our moral high ground and ultimately weakens our power to persuade and lead. We have always been a thoughtful nation guided by solid moral values and we must continue to be held in that esteem.

We can only assure success by adhering to those principles that have guided us for more than 200 years as a nation. Leadership does not exist without vision, but that vision must emerge from values that are enduring. Words must be followed by action. Vision without action is merely a day dream.

The point is that without a clear commitment to a set of values that guides policy, we make inconsistent decisions, contradictory judgments and bad choices. It is not good enough to have good morals or strong faith. We must stay focused on and guided by those enduring principles.

Despite the climate in Washington, despite hordes of writers proclaiming our doom as China and India emerge, we must remain optimistic, hopeful, and confident in tough times and in the face of change.

Confident in our people's ability to succeed. Optimistic that our values will strengthen the weak in America. And hopeful that the words of leaders will be followed by action and deed.

Father Edward Sorin, founder of this University, was such a leader. In April 1879, he found that a fire had destroyed the Notre Dame main building. His life work was gone and he was 65 years old. His response was to say: "even if it were all destroyed again, I should never give up."

He rebuilt the campus, and the Golden Dome shone more brightly than ever before.

We should never give up either. This is the call to all of us, young and old, to serve others.

I opened with a quote from St. Francis, and so I will close with one as well that I hope you will take to heart: "I have been all things unholy." -- I am quoting, just to remind you. -- "If God can work through me, he can work through anyone."

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